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ABSTRACT

After reading a novel as a group, students prepare a television talk show that uses the characters from the story as the characters on the show. Students develop interview-style questions and answers for a character in the novel, and then act out the interview in class. During ten to eleven 45-minute lessons, students will: examine a character based on explicit and implicit information found in the novel; support their assumptions about a character by summarizing information from the novel; develop questions that could be answered by a character in the novel based on their examination and understanding of the character; prepare answers to the questions that they developed based on their understanding of the character and his or her personality; and integrate the questions and answers into a television show skit and then perform the show as a final project. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A character worksheet and a list of important interview information are attached. (PM)

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Lights, Camera, Action: Interviewing a Book Character

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Grade Band

6-8

Estimated Lesson Time

Ten to eleven 45-minute periods

Overview

While reading, students closely examine the different characters in a novel by keeping journal entries, meeting for group discussions, and using an online graphic organizer. This extensive character examination helps them prepare for a final project that involves creating an interview-style television show where students write the script and assume the roles of the television host and the characters on the show. Questions can be about events from the novel as well as other topics that were not explicitly covered in the novel. Answers are based on students' knowledge of the characters and their personalities.

From Theory to Practice

Van Horn, L. (1997). The characters within us: Readers connect with characters to create meaning and understanding. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 40,* 342-347.

- Students who read with introspection and respond with purpose come to view themselves as readers and writers who have a duty to think and create.
- Pretending to be a character motivates more purposeful reading and writing.

Student Objectives

Students will

- Examine a character based on explicit and implicit information found in the novel
- Support their assumptions about a character by summarizing information from the novel
- Develop questions that could be answered by a character in the novel based on their examination and understanding of the character
- Prepare answers to the questions that they developed based on their understanding of the character and his or her personality
- Integrate the questions and answers into a television show skit and then perform the show as a final project

Resources

- Folders for each character
- Novel of choice

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- Video camera (optional)
- Character Traits worksheet
- Important Interview Information handout
- RubiStar
- Teach-nology: Web Tools for Educators
- Bridging the Gap: Group Work Rubrics and Checklists
- Computers with Internet access
- Costumes or outfits (optional)
- Interactive Story Map
- PowerPoint, Microsoft Word, or another word processing program
- Student journal

Instructional Plan

Introduction

Before reading, make sure that students are aware of the final project, which involves writing questions and answers for an interview-style television show and acting the part or "becoming" a character from the novel. Gather students into small groups and assign each group a different character from the novel. While reading, each group should focus on what makes their character unique from the other characters in the story. They should also note any events throughout the novel that create changes in their character or give insight into their character's personality. Each group of students will be responsible for keeping a folder on their character, including handwritten notes, computer printouts, and graphic organizers.

Instruction and Activities

Remind students that each group will represents a different character in the novel. While reading, students need to pay close attention to the character that they have been assigned and meet at least three times to discuss their character as a group.

During reading

1. Refer students to the Important Interview Information handout and explain good interviewing strategies. It would be helpful to have students watch a 10- to 15-minute interview segment from Oprah or another talk show and discuss the interviewing strategies used on the show. Are there any strategies that students notice are not on the handout? If they were going to grade Oprah (or another host) on their interviewing skills, what would they look for? Can they define the layout of the talk show (introduction, interview, closing)? Remind students that all of these things will be important when they create their own interview talk show.

2. The first group meeting should be scheduled when students begin reading the novel (one class period). Assign each group a character in the novel to focus on during their reading. At this meeting, students can create a folder to store all of their notes and information while reading. The folder should be labeled with the names of each student in the group, the title and author of the novel, and the name of the assigned character.

3. Make sure that students are keeping notes about their character in their journal while reading,

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including explicit and implicit information from the story. For example, in their journal entries (either computerized or handwritten), students should track important events in the novel that are pertinent to their character. They might also explore how their character reacts to an event or situation as an indication of the character's personality or values.

4. Before the next group meeting, encourage each student to access the online, interactive Story Map to create and print a character map. Although students do not have to be in exactly the same place in the story, they should be relatively close in order for their character maps to be comparable. Some students may need assistance completing the online character map even though instructions are included. Remind students to print their character map before closing the program.

5. Students should schedule a second meeting with their group after reading one-third to one-half of the novel (one class period). At this meeting, encourage students to discuss what they have learned about their character by sharing their journal entries and character maps. Students can compare information, discuss what is important about their character, and compile their ideas into a master list, which should be typed in a word processing program. They might also make predictions about what will happen in the story and to their character.

6. After the second group meeting, students continue reading and go back to the online Story Map to each complete an additional map. Give students the option to complete the setting map, conflict map, or resolution map, and again remind them to print a copy to share with their group.

7. The third group meeting should be scheduled after students have read two-thirds of the novel (one class period). Again, encourage students to compare their journal entries and also the individual story maps they created. At this point in the reading, they should know more about their character and be able to discuss whether he or she has changed. If changes have occurred, they can discuss the reasons for the change and summarize the actions or events in the novel that led to the growth or decline of their character. Student can again compile their notes and ideas into a master list, which should be typed on the computer.

8. When students have finished reading the novel, ask them to each complete the Character Traits worksheet. Although students are asked to complete the worksheet individually, they can refer to the notes and materials from their group's character folder to formulate their responses.

Final project

1. After reading the novel, explain how students can develop good interview questions. Refer back to Oprah or another talk show, and ask students to recall their discussion of good interviewing strategies. Help students differentiate open-ended questions, and explain how they can create open-ended questions using information from the novel. Create a few sample questions using phrases like, "Tell me about. . . " or "What were you thinking when. . ."

2. Set aside one day to discuss the actual performance and explain the grading.

    - Students should select an interviewer, an interviewee, a camera operator, and a stagehand (responsible for cue cards, signs for audience like applause, laughing, etc). If there are more than four students in the group or you decide that a camera operator is not necessary, students can each take part in the performance by switching places during a "commercial break."
    - Each group will have four to seven minutes to present their television show to their peers.
    - Students should be aware of the criteria that will be used to evaluate their final performance. In addition to the final performance, students will also be evaluated on their ability to work as a team. Prepare a rubric or checklist in advance and share it with your students. There are several rubric creators on the Internet, such as RubiStar and Teach-nology: Web Tools for Educators.

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3. Set aside three days for students to develop between 6 to 10 interview questions to ask their character, along with the respective answers. Questions should relate to the novel. Physical descriptions of the character are acceptable, but should not dominate the interview. Students should be reminded to use their journal and graphic organizers to help them develop questions. After writing the questions, they **must** find or develop answers using their notes or the book.

    - To help shape questions and answers for the character interview, groups can review the materials in their character folder and their journal entries to identify major events that influenced their character. For other ideas, they can also try searching the Internet to find student-created websites dedicated to the novel. [If there are no websites available for the novel, students can create their own webpage for the novel as an extension activity.]

    - Rotate among the groups while they are creating their character interview to monitor and track their progress and offer assistance. If necessary, provide each group three to four sample questions and ask them to create five to six additional questions on their own. Expectations for this activity depend on the level of your students and their ability to work as a group.

    - Instruct students to prepare their "script" in a word processing or slideshow program (e.g., PowerPoint). [If students are unfamiliar with PowerPoint, they can access "PowerPoint in the Classroom," which is a student-friendly online guide. Online guides are also available for Kid Pix Studio and HyperStudio.]

4. Before the presentation, each group should elect one person to represent the character on the television show and another person to act as the host. The other students in the group can participate as the camera operator and stagehand, or they can all take turns being the interviewer and interviewee.

5. Allow students four to seven minutes to present their television show to their peers. While performing, the student answering the questions should act as if he or she is the actual character from the book and the host should act as if he or she is a real television show host. Questions from the "audience" could be used as well.

Extensions

- Invite students to evaluate the performance given by their peers. With your guidance, students can use the online rubric creators to determine the evaluation criteria.

- Use a video camera to tape the students' television talk shows. Share the performance with parents or guardians at teacher conferences.

Student Assessment/Reflections

- Use a rubric to assess group work. Several rubrics are available at Bridging the Gap: Group Work Rubrics and Checklists.

- Involve students in creating a checklist that addresses the goals that are important within this lesson.

- Observation of group teamwork, completion of character folders, individual journal entries, and participation in the television skit would be important parts of any rubric or checklist.

IRA/NCTE Standards

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

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Character's Name:

Name three traits that this character shows in the novel, such as giving, loving, happy, sad, or abusive.

When do you see this character demonstrate these traits? Use information from the book to prove that the character has these three traits.

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Important Interview Information

► BODY LANGUAGE

How does the interviewer (the one asking the questions) look while talking to the interviewee (the one answering the questions)?

GOOD	BAD
Makes direct eye contact	Looks away or rolls eyes
Sits facing the person	Sits facing away from the person
Legs crossed at ankles	Legs crossed at thighs
Arms at side or in front	Arms crossed
Shoulders up and back straight	Shoulders slumped or slouching

► SPEAKING

What does the interviewer sound like while talking to the interviewee?

GOOD	BAD
Speaks slowly	Speaks very fast
Good articulation of words	Words mumbled; not understood
Fluctuates voice (high and low)	Uses monotone speech
Speaks loudly	Speaks softly or quietly
Does not interrupt	Interrupts the interviewee

► INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What type of questions does the interviewer ask the interviewee?

GOOD	BAD
Asks open-ended questions	Asks questions that require one- or two-word responses
Asks questions that relate to the interviewee	Asks questions that do not seem to relate to the interviewee
Is ready to ask questions	Is not ready to ask questions; seems unprepared

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